

Love God not the world

1/12/19 dkm

Read: Joshua 7, 1John 2:1-17

Text: 1John 2:15-17

Psalms: 47, 16:5-9, 49:12-20, 72old

A bumper sticker I once saw epitomises the spirit of the world in which we live: it read, 'Lust not love'. Not many are so frank about their way of life; they prefer to say 'passion' rather than 'lust'. People are passionate about their football, their food, their job, or passionate about the environment. These are the gods of our age, and people are passionate about their gods. Some worship these gods with their whole being. Just as love is central to our worship of God, lust is central to their worship of things created by God. The love we see in Jesus freely gives, while the lust seen in the world satisfies self.

The apostle John expands on the bumper sticker as he contrasts love and lust, or more specifically, love for God and lust for the things of the world- he expands three words into three verses! John brings us to a fundamental truth, not of the gospel itself but of living as a child of God in this world. 'If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation, old things have passed away; behold all things have become new' (2Cor 5:17). As a born-again believer you are a new person, but you are still living in this old world, this world of sin and death, this world ruled by Satan. When Jesus prays for you he does not pray that you be taken out of this world but that the Lord will keep you from the evil one because you are not of this world (John 17:15,16). He has put you in this world for a purpose, namely to love him and glorify his name, not to love the world and glorify your name. We are in the world but not of the world. As the old hymn says, 'This world is not my home, I'm just a pass'in through'.

John is writing to a church into which false teachers were coming, teachers saying they were not sinners, and that keeping the commands was not important. They were dualists, people separating mind and body. They could indulge the flesh without affecting their

minds because it was 'special knowledge' that was important to salvation; they could have a pure mind while giving their body over to moral impurity. Peter similarly warns of false teachers 'having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin' (2Peter 2:14). Corrupted doctrine leads to corrupted behaviour. It happened in Jeremiah's day, it happened in Jesus' day, and it still happens today.

John gave the church four tests which they could use with false teachers. They could be used for self-examination also: do you keep Christ's commands, do you live a Christ-like life, do you love your brother, and do you believe Jesus is both human and divine? Lest he discourage his 'little children', John paused to give assurances of forgiveness of sin, of abiding in Christ, and of having overcome the evil one. Yes, the evil one or Satan is 'roaming around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour' (1Peter 5:8). The 'father of lies' is out to trip us up with all manner of trials and temptations: remember Job; remember Jesus. The world, the flesh, and the devil, all mentioned in verse 14-17, are opposed to our walking in the light with Jesus our Saviour and Lord.

The Greek word '*kosmos*' is translated 'world', but it can mean different things depending on the context. Here in these verses 'the world' refers to the cultures and systems men have devised, the world of people loving 'the things of the world'. It is the 'Babylon' of the book of Revelation. The world is ruled by Satan. The world rejected Jesus and it continues to reject him. Do not be surprised that the world hates you (John 15:18). The world prefers darkness to light 'because their deeds are evil' (John 3:19). The things of this world appeal to the sinful nature, so we must be watching and praying because the flesh is weak.

John uses the word 'world' six times in these three verses, so it is difficult to miss his point: 'do not love the world' (2:15). You might ask how it is that, 'God so loved the world...' in John 3:16, but now tells us not to love the world. When God loves the world it is love for

sinful human beings not the physical world that he made, or the cultures and systems devised by men. He was not condoning the sin of sinners or associating with them in sin. We are in the world to share the truth of the gospel, not to share with people in their sin.

In his love for the world God sent his Son to die for the sins of the world (2:2), so we could be saved from sin. When we believe in Jesus we will turn away from the things of the world and live in a way that pleases God. We cannot love God and love the world at the same time. This is the first reason John gives for not loving the world. The second is that the world is passing away.

1. Which will it be- God or the world?

In his sermon on the mount, Jesus said that just as we cannot serve two masters, so we cannot serve God and mammon (Mat 6:24)? He could have said, just as a husband cannot love two women, or a wife two men, at the same time. Love, true love, is jealous and exclusive. A husband who is not jealous for his wife is not loving her as he should. God is a jealous God. He will not have us loving another god. This is the basis of the first commandment: 'You shall have no other gods before me' (Exod 20:5).

John commands us, 'Do not love the world or the things in the world' (2:15). If you start loving the world and getting caught up in its focus on mammon or money, its focus on possessions, position and power, you have ceased loving God as you must. The church at Ephesus had lost its first love; it had fallen and needed to repent (Rev 2:4, 5).

What was this first love? Was it love for Christ or love for one another? It doesn't really matter because if we lose our love for Christ we will lose our love for one another, and if we lose our love for one another we have lost our love for Christ. The church at Ephesus was still working hard for the Lord and doing lots of good, but in losing its first love it would soon face divine judgment- 'unless you repent' (Rev 2:5). God will not tolerate his people giving their love to another. Sure, God made this physical world but we are not

to love what God has made; we are to love God himself (Rom 1:25). Many of the things we love in this world actually come out of factories in China! They are man-made things, electronic gadgets, cars, boats and houses, or maybe an icon of some sort sitting on the shelf.

The world, and the things in this world, became alternate gods when Adam and Eve sinned. Eve lusted after the fruit of the tree that God told Adam not to eat. The devil tempted her and she gave way to this lust of the flesh and lust of her eyes, and indeed the pride of life, there in that very first sin. She 'saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise' (Gen 3:6). John makes these same points when he lists 'all that is in the world' (2:16).

Love for the world shows up in 'the lust of the flesh', or as the NIV translates, 'the cravings of sinful man' (2:16). The word 'lust' is stronger than 'cravings' or 'desires', and it pairs with the next 'lust' 'the lust of the eyes'. The new creation that we become when we believe refers to the heart or renewed mind; we are not given a new body or new flesh until the resurrection. The flesh is still weak, and through this weak flesh we are tempted. Jesus was tempted when he was hungry. Not many of us go hungry but poor people may be tempted to steal because of hunger (Prov 30:9). When we are weary we are open to temptation. When we are sick we are open to temptation. We may not call it lust, but the desire for good health can eclipse our love for God. Certainly the desire for physical beauty that drives us to the gym or the beauty parlour can arise from the lust of the flesh.

The lust that drives men to massage parlours or to commit adultery is the lust of the flesh. Psychologists who follow Freud's theories would be horrified at the Bible's use of the word 'lust'. They tell us that sex outside marriage is a natural way of satisfying the sex drive. For those still controlled by their sinful nature this may be true, but

not for men and women who have been delivered from sin, and in Christ have been given victory over the lusts of the flesh. 'Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts' writes Paul (Rom 13:14).

The second 'lust' is 'the lust of the eyes' (2:16). I was going to reference King David under the lust of the flesh but his adultery began with the lust of the eyes. From the roof of his palace, David 'saw a woman bathing, and the woman was beautiful to behold' (2Sam 11:2). Men young and old, men from all walks of life, lust more than David when their eyes start viewing pornography. Not all go out and commit adultery like David, but this lust of the eyes leads to the destruction of their souls. Such lust 'is not of the Father but of the world' (2:16). We must take care in what our eyes take in, remembering the words of Jesus: 'If your eye causes you to sin pluck it out' (Mat 5:29).

Lust of the eyes extends to many other things. Coveting anything that belongs to another is sin. Achan was judged for coveting gold and Babylonian garments (Josh 7:21). Lusting after any material thing is sin. It is not wrong to have possessions but it is wrong to love or treasure such things. Jesus tells us to lay up our treasure in heaven not on earth because, 'where your treasure is there your heart will be also' (Mat 6:21). Moreover, treasures on earth can easily be destroyed in a fire or a flood, or in a car crash, or they can be stolen. Do keep a watch over your eyes and don't allow them to lust after the things of this world.

The third and final 'lust' is called 'the pride of life' (2:16). This is most insidious because it is not about the five senses or the flesh, but about the heart. Pride leads to boasting, boasting in what we have or who we are. Some boast in their riches, others in their family heritage, their education or their job. Remember the politician who protested to the waiter, 'Don't you know who I am!' It is said of some that, 'He is a self-made man and he worships his creator'. The parable of the rich fool epitomises such a man (Luke 12:16-21).

'We must reject all boasting, lest the bricks of our vanity crumble down upon us. We cannot let a hint of the pride of life creep into the church'. Children of God try to make their Father proud of them; they do not proudly take glory to themselves. God resists the proud but give grace to the humble' (James 4:6). You cannot lift yourself up by your boot laces; only God can lift you up. In Jesus Christ he has lifted us up and made us sit with Him in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6).

2. World is passing away

What happened to the rich fool and his overflowing barns? Did he enjoy a life of eating, drinking and being merry? (Luke 12:19). God called him a fool because he was dead the next day. The Pharaohs tried to take all their riches with them when they died but these riches are still in the pyramids- unless already looted! 'How foolish' you say. But many are yet to hear and heed the words of Jesus, 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul' (Mat 16:26). You cannot take your riches with you when you die (Ps 49:17). The missionary martyr, Jim Elliot, got it right when he said, 'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose'. Missionary friends of mine often said, 'Only one life and it is soon past, only what's done for Christ will last'.

Jesus said, 'Heaven and earth are passing away' (Mat 24:35). Peter reminds us of this truth (2Peter 3:10). In a context similar to that of John, Paul writes, 'the present form of this world is passing away' (1Cor 7:31). John reminds us that the world which sinful men and women are lusting after is passing away (2:17). Soon it will be no more. What then of your riches, your possessions, and your pleasures? Let the ungodly pursue what is ephemeral; you must pursue what is eternal. Do not envy the wicked; tell them what you have learned today. It is not the rich and famous who will abide forever but you who do the will of God (2:17), you who are abiding in Christ, the eternal Son of God.